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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [WFP](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN - ADDITIONAL FOOD AID NEEDED

REF: Macklin-Stoddard email of 12/5/08

11. (SBU) Summary and Action Recommendation. Total food aid from international donors, combined with the Afghan government's wheat purchases, adds up to only one-quarter of Afghanistan's wheat production shortfall estimated at 2.5 million metric tons this year. Commercial imports and smuggling will fill much of the gap, but the shortfall is so big this year that there will still be many people who need food. The World Food Program predicts there will be a break in the food pipeline in April 2009, coinciding with the height of the hunger season in Afghanistan. Post recommends that the FFP program allocate another \$100 million to prevent a break in the pipeline and supply wheat for 8.8 million vulnerable Afghans during April-June 2009. WFP reports good progress with its winter pre-positioning effort, with 95 percent of the 36,000 mt of the designated food stocks already delivered to destinations in the most vulnerable areas. Insecurity and mountainous terrain have hampered delivery of the balance, but the established mechanism for requesting ISAF military support to protect food convoys in insecure areas is operating adequately. End Summary

#### BACKGROUND

12. (U) Afghanistan consumes about 6 million metric tons (mt) of wheat each year. It regularly produces less than it consumes and makes up the difference largely through commercial wheat imports. A severe drought made 2008 an especially bad year for Afghanistan's wheat crop, with a production shortfall estimated at 2.5 million mt. (Shortfalls are normally much smaller, in the range of 500,000 to 1 million mt.)

13. (U) Typically much of the shortfall is made up through wheat purchases from neighboring countries. Higher prices here than elsewhere in the region usually attract a lot of wheat, much of it smuggled. While wheat prices have doubled since last year, reflecting the poor harvest and world prices, the good news is that

prices have declined by about 20 percent from their recent peak, indicating that there are adequate supplies in the market at present for those with buying power.

#### STATUS OF WFP WINTER PRE-POSITIONING

¶4. (U) On December 1, WFP staff briefed the international community on the status of the current Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) and winter pre-positioning of food. The total WFP 2008 program is 387,000 metric tons (mt), 157,000 mt of this provided with USG assistance. WFP is targeting wheat and other food supplies to 8.8 million of the country's most vulnerable people. Of this WFP total, 36,000 mt or less than 10 percent of the PRRO has been planned for winter pre-positioning. This food is meant to reach 520,000 recipients in 95 mountainous districts in 23 provinces likely to be cut off by winter snows. According to WFP, about 95 percent of these pre-positioned supplies are now in place.

#### AFGHAN GOVERNMENT PURCHASES

¶5. (SBU) The Afghan government expects to spend \$100 million on wheat to help address the shortfall, purchasing up to 240,000 mt from neighboring countries (e.g. Kazakhstan). We understand the GIROA intends to put 110,000 mt of this in a strategic grain reserve. The rest is likely to be given away for free. Unfortunately, GIROA officials have provided few details on how they will distribute this food. Distribution may be politically motivated; i.e. the food may well not go to those the WFP regards as the neediest.

#### MILITARY PROTECTION OF WFP CONVOYS

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¶6. (SBU) Road insecurity and the challenge of inaccessible mountain terrain have prevented the delivery of 400-500 mt of these critical stocks to planned destinations, especially to insecure areas in northern Herat, Dai Kundi and Baghdis provinces. A mechanism is in place for WFP to request military support from ISAF to protect food convoys, which begins with action by WFP local coordinators in the provinces. This mechanism has been used several times since September, and ISAF stands ready to consider further requests. Also, WFP on December 10 requested ISAF airlift support to deliver food to Jawand district in Badghis. The Charge on December 6 had discussed with UN SRSG Kai Eide the likely need for additional military support to protect food delivery convoys to vulnerable and insecure areas, and Eide agreed to raise the matter with WFP. (Note: ISAF units provide protection for food delivery convoys and do not try to secure entire routes beyond the temporary security needed to protect the convoy in question.)

#### AFGHAN FOOD NEEDS BEYOND MARCH 2009

¶7. (U) Beyond this winter, WFP reported a shortfall of \$240 million to cover the purchase of an additional 280,000 mt of food, to extend distribution to the neediest beyond March through the rest of 2009. Of this, WFP says 100,000 mt is needed during April-June.

¶8. (SBU) Bottom line: Total food aid from the international community, combined with the Afghan government's wheat purchases, adds up to only about one-quarter of the total shortfall. The commercial market will fill much of the gap, but the shortfall this year is such that there will still be many people who need food. Because four to six months is needed from the time food assistance is pledged until it is dispatched in Afghanistan, WFP predicts there will be a break in the food pipeline in April 2009. This projected break would coincide with the height of the hunger season in Afghanistan, which is immediately before the winter wheat harvest in late spring.

#### USG ACTION TO DATE

¶9. (U) As Washington agencies are aware, in 2008 the USG more than doubled its food aid to Afghanistan through WFP, compared with our contributions in 2007 or 2006. Our food is now reaching an estimated 4.5 million poor Afghans out of the estimated total of 8.8

million in need. In 2008 the USG provided more than \$50 million for a seed and fertilizer voucher program, to get more winter wheat in the ground quickly and boost next year's harvest.

¶10. (SBU) USAID is also now working to shift an additional \$100 million in funding from other programs to provide additional help with Afghanistan's food security needs; \$50 million will go towards cash-for-work programs, to boost the poor's purchasing power (especially in urban areas); \$50 million will be added to the successful agricultural vouchers program, with the harvest from these plantings starting in June. Embassy Kabul will encourage the PRTs to provide additional and substantial resources for cash-for-work programs, as soon as possible; these are excellent ways to increase purchasing power and help address food needs.

#### ADDITIONAL EFFORTS BY THE U.S. MISSION

¶11. (U) Post will continue to work closely with WFP, the GIROA, our PRTs, and other donors to share information on food aid delivery efforts and the government's food distribution plans. USAID will also conduct an independent analysis of the food security situation, based on data from three provinces -- Badghis, Ghor and Ghazni -- to provide a broad view of conditions for food distribution. In Badghis, despite poor security in vulnerable areas, WFP implementers

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have reportedly been reluctant to use ISAF assets for security, resulting in a disrupted distribution schedule. In Ghor, logistics in accessing remote areas present problems for distribution of pre-positioned food stores. In Ghazni, a concerted effort with PRT and maneuver security forces has ensured delivery to vulnerable districts. USAID staff will verify current food security conditions, identify ongoing challenges to distribution, and propose solutions. This spot-check analysis will be conducted in the next three weeks with a report expected o/a January 5.

¶12. (U) Recognizing that the food security situation is dynamic, USAID's Famine Early Warning Network (FEWSNET) will send a team to Afghanistan to begin a food security assessment in January. The team will prepare a report on national food security needs and the impact of the WFP distribution programs, expected to be completed by the end of February.

#### ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

¶13. (SBU) With respect to questions raised refmail, Post believes that given the progress to date in WFP's winter pre-positioning effort and smooth operation of the existing mechanism for requesting and providing ISAF protection, any issues of possible additional military support for WFP convoys are best handled in country. Further, military airdrops are often not effective at delivering food to those who most need it but they remain an option that can be implemented as permitted by operational requirements and available resources.

¶14. (SBU) The key challenge here is making sure WFP's pipeline is not broken in March/April, as feared. Post therefore recommends that FFP allocate a further \$100 million in additional food aid to supply wheat via WFP for 8.8 million vulnerable people from April-June, when the harvest begins. While we should also urge other donors to increase their food aid pledges for 2008, 2009 and beyond, their record to date suggests we should not expect a strong response. The GIROA does not have additional resources to buy food. Beyond the obvious humanitarian aspect, the U.S. has a strong interest in preventing hunger-related social unrest in the critical pre-election period.

WOOD